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State participation in ecosystem management

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Abstract

The Utah Department of Natural Resources initiated a number of programs before the term "ecosystem management" came into vogue that employ principles and concepts characteristic of EM. The Book Cliffs Conservation Initiative is a cooperative, multiple-use undertaking by the State, Bureau of Land Management, Nature Conservancy, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, and private landowners. Antelope Island State Park is a cooperative management effort by several state agencies, and Salt Lake and Davis counties, managed by the state Division of Parks and Recreation, and engaging active public participation. The Southwestern Utah Planning Authorities Council is a coordinated effort by representatives of 18 federal, state, tribal, and local government entities to manage the Virgin River basin. It is intended to be an experiment in intergovernmental cooperation in ecosystem management. If it succeeds in the Virgin River basin, we hope to implement it elsewhere in the state. The Escalante Canyon Task Force is an effort by federal, state, and local officials to designate an area of spectacular natural resources as a national conservation area, and reconcile the competing demands of the environmental community and historic land users (grazing, timber, mining, oil and gas).

Five perspectives on ecosystem management: (1) It concentrates on prevention rather than repair through comprehensive cooperation and coordination. (2) The states must take the lead in implementing ecosystem management. (3) It is a process, not an outcome, involving communication and coordination between various levels of government and citizenry. (4) It cannot be "top-down driven," a mechanism of central planning. (5) It cannot be a tool of such "second agendas" as a means of expanding federal power, diminishing property rights, or tolerating bad science.

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank and congratulate Utah State University and Dean Joe Chapman for a highly successful symposium. I began yesterday's session with many more unanswered questions about the subject of ecosystem management than I have today. That tells me that this has been well worth my time, and I hope that you can say the same.

I would like to recount a few of the experiences of the State of Utah in attempting to manage ecosystems and to share with you some miscellaneous thoughts on the subject.

One caveat I would like to insert at the beginning is that a number of the things I will relate were initiated *before* the concept of "ecosystem management" came into vogue. In other words, we were ecosystem managers and we did not even know it!

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT EXAMPLES IN UTAH

BOOK CLIFFS CONSERVATION INITIATIVE

I believe the finest example of ecosystem management in the State is found in the Book Cliffs initiative in east-central Utah. This initiative was cooperatively developed by the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources, the Bureau of Land Management, the Nature Conservancy, and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation. Other organizations have been supportive players also.

The Book Cliffs initiative encompasses an area of approximately 455,000 acres. Some 70% (319,000 acres) of the total is administered by the Bureau of Land Management, 25% (114,000 acres) are lands administered by the Utah Division of State Lands and Forestry, and 5% (22,000 acres) are privately owned lands.

The private lands are the key to the initiative. As is usually the case, the bulk of the private lands are located within four ranches in the canyon bottoms, containing streams which flow through the area. The key objective has been to purchase at least three of the four ranches, all three of which have been on the market. Currently, that has largely been accomplished.

Ownership of the ranches will allow for control of grazing on permitted federal lands. Better management of grazing will allow for restoration of riparian areas and enhancement of watersheds which have been adversely impacted in the past.

Public ownership will also restrict the amount of private development that can occur in the area—development which

could be in competition with the primary wildlife values. Finally, public control of the ranches would allow for greater public access to this unique and valuable area of wildlife habitat.

The wildlife species in the area include moose, bison, bighorn sheep, black bear, deer, elk, antelope, mountain lion, waterfowl, shorebirds, blue and sage grouse, golden eagles, numerous hawks, and many small mammals, birds, amphibians, and reptiles. A number of endangered or sensitive species also inhabit the area, including the Mexican spotted owl, peregrine falcon, and Colorado cutthroat trout.

It is the intent of the initiative participants to manage the Book Cliffs as a multiple-use showcase. Management will focus on increased wildlife density and diversity, riparian habitat, enhanced water quality, fisheries expansion, and recreational opportunities. But other uses such as livestock grazing, mineral development, and oil and gas production will continue in an environmentally sensitive fashion.

Cooperative management between the federal and state administrators will be emphasized. A coordinated resource management plan is to be put in place.

This is an excellent example of management of an ecosystem. There have been roadblocks, however. One is the opposition by some to the purchase of private lands by public entities. Another is the fact that the significant number of acres which are School Trust Lands (approximately 1/4 of the total) must be managed for optimization of revenues to the Trust. That block of 114,000 acres of Trust Lands is among the most valuable in the area because it is currently roadless. We are committed to finding a way to obtain those lands for the initiative if at all possible.

ANTELOPE ISLAND STATE PARK

Antelope Island is an island of approximately 26,000 acres in the south end of the Great Salt Lake. The Utah Division of Parks and Recreation is the owner. For a number of years prior to the early 1980s, the island was accessible by a causeway from the northeast. Modest facilities existed on the north 2,000 acres of the island.

In the early 1980s, however, abnormally high precipitation led to a rise in the level of the Great Salt Lake which flooded and destroyed the causeway. It was not reopened until just last year.

Antelope Island is a jewel in the state park system. It is an island which remains largely untouched, even though it is within a veritable stones-throw of Utah's population center. The planning which State Parks has undertaken in order to arrive upon its resource-management plan for the development of Antelope Island State Park is an example of ecosystem management.

As the lake began to recede, and pressure to reopen the island increased, there was a temptation to throw together a plan and let the chips (a technical term here, inasmuch as Antelope Island is home to a large herd of buffalo) fall where they may. The Division chose to follow a much more disciplined path.

State Parks was fortunate in that years of study and research associated with acquisition, condemnation proceedings, and academic curiosity had resulted in an abundance of papers, reports, and studies regarding the island. These resources were used as a baseline for the Division's management process.

The Division further leveraged its limited resources by calling upon a long list of state and local governmental agencies including: Utah Geological Survey, Wildlife Resources, Water Resources, State History, Salt Lake County and Davis County. The creation of long-term relationships with the two mentioned counties which are most impacted by the park was especially important.

Planners made every effort to obtain public input. The public-participation effort included an open house, three public meetings, a questionnaire handed out to visitors to the park once it reopened, and constant outreach to public agencies and officials.

The public involvement also included opportunities for the public to comment on the "near draft" of the plan.

This process was admittedly slow and laborious. That fact led to an effort in this last legislative session by one of the counties most affected by the park to take over its ownership. The county admitted that its planning processes were much less detailed. This points to one of the general negatives of ecosystem management: to those in a hurry, it can be frustratingly slow!

Nonetheless, the care and attention to detail in the Antelope Island Management Resource Plan will pay off to the State Division of Parks and Recreation as it undertakes the process of obtaining support in the legislature for needed funds, and as partnerships with other agencies of government and private entities are established, and finally as the public begins to enjoy the exquisite natural resource that Antelope Island is.

SOUTHWEST UTAH PLANNING AUTHORITIES COUNCIL (SUPAC)

Southwestern Utah is unique among areas of the West. It is the confluence of three very distinct ecosystems—the Great Basin ecosystem, the Colorado Plateau ecosystem, and the Mojave Desert ecosystem. Washington County has become the battleground for almost every public-land and natural-resource issue imaginable, including wild and scenic river protection, endangered and sensitive species, wilderness designation, water development, concerns over groundwater depletion, federal reserved water rights, protection of national park values, etc.

Local governments find themselves under attack. Level upon level of state and federal governments are engaged in planning for the area. Most such planning was conducted in a void, with little real participation by other governmental agencies.

In a meeting with Utah's Governor Leavitt last summer, a number of federal officials, in a moment of real candor, admitted that the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and the Forest Service were going down their respective resource planning paths with little or no communication among themselves, let alone with local and state agencies.

Governor Leavitt suggested, and the federal agencies willingly agreed to participate in, a novel approach to ecosystem management.

Since early last fall, 18 representatives of federal, state, tribal, and local government entities have been meeting in an effort to coordinate planning activities in southwest Utah. The effort is referred to as Southwest Utah Planning Authorities Council (SUPAC). The ecosystem in question is the Virgin River basin. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding under which we agreed to coordinate our planning activities as closely as possible, avoiding unnecessary duplication where feasible. We have created a technical team which is exploring ways to maximize access to one another's data systems. We have put into place a common planning calendar.

A very concrete success occurred in our last meeting. It was agreed that the three major federal agencies—Forest Service, National Park Service, and Bureau of Land Management—would work together with other members of the committee to integrate analysis of potential wild and scenic river units within the Virgin River basin. This is an issue that has risen to the top in the list of potential hot-spots in recent months, and the agreement to allow input from local and state governments at the earliest possible stage of planning is a signal of the federal agencies' commitment in making this process work.

SUPAC is intended to be an experiment in intergovernmental cooperation and ecosystem management. If it succeeds in the Virgin River basin, we hope to implement it elsewhere in the state.

ESCALANTE CANYON TASK FORCE

The Escalante Canyon area of southern Utah is among the most spectacular backcountry in the world. A national park and a national recreation area border it on the south and the east. A designated Forest Service wilderness area makes up its northern border. On the west lies the Kaiparowits Plateau.

The unique character of the area has made it a fertile plain for resource conflicts. A large portion of the canyon area is sought to be designated for Bureau of Land Management wilderness by the environmental community. On the other hand, those who reside there are concerned about maintaining as much of an economic base as possible. The historical uses include grazing, timber production, mining, and oil and gas production.

A few years ago, the local Bureau of Land Management office joined with the local community to attempt the creation of a national conservation area. The boundaries were not confined to Bureau of Land Management boundaries alone; Forest Service, national park and monument, and State Trust Lands were all considered part of the Escalante Canyon ecosystem and were included in the proposed conservation area. A bill was introduced in Congress to designate the area a national conservation area subject to the conditions agreed upon.

Unfortunately, congressional reapportionment and the emergence of other priorities resulted in the effort falling dormant for two years.

However, there is currently an attempt to resurrect the concept. Federal, state, and local officials are again meeting to formulate an innovative way to protect the Escalante Canyon ecosystem. It is a serious effort to protect the unique national qualities of the canyons, while trying to preserve as many of the historic use patterns as possible.

We are not confining our discussions to the former proposal, nor to existing concepts of land management. What will ultimately come out of the work of the Escalante Canyon task force is yet to be seen, but it is another example of an effort to undertake the management of an ecosystem without the constraints of land ownership or administration.

There are other examples that, if time allowed, I could detail. I am confident that with the knowledge gained over the last few days, we as a state will be even more aware of opportunities to initiate or participate in ecosystem management.

PERSONAL PERSPECTIVES

For the remainder of my allotted time, I would like to give you some personal perspectives on this subject. These do not follow any particular order or pattern so please bear with me.

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT IS THE "FENCE," IN CONTRAST TO THE "AMBULANCE"

Let me provide a slight change of pace if I may. I would like to share with you portions of a poem by Joseph Malins entitled "A Fence or an Ambulance." I hope that its relevance to the subject at hand will be clear to you.

Twas a dangerous cliff, as they freely confessed,
though to walk near its crest was so pleasant;
but over its terrible edge there had slipped
a duke and full many a peasant.
So the people said something would have to be done,
but their projects did not at all tally;
some said, "Put a fence around the edge of the cliff,"
some, "An ambulance down in the valley."

But the cry for the ambulance carried the day,
for it spread through the neighboring city;
a fence may be useful or not, it is true,
but each heart became brimful of pity
for those who slipped over that dangerous cliff;
and the dwellers in highway and alley
gave pounds or pence, not to put up a fence,
but an ambulance down in the valley.

"For the cliff is all right, if you're careful," they said,
"and, if folks even slip and are dropping,
it isn't the slipping that hurts them so much,
as the shock down below when they're stopping."
So day after day, as these mishaps occurred,
quick forth would these rescuers sally
to pick up the victims who fell off the cliff,
with their ambulance down in the valley.

Then an old sage remarked: "It's a marvel to me
that people give far more attention
to repairing results than to stopping the cause,
when they'd much better aim at prevention.
Let us stop at its source all this mischief," cried he,
"come, neighbors and friends, let us rally;
if the cliff we will fence we might almost dispense
with the ambulance down in the valley."

"Oh, he's a fanatic," the others rejoined,
"dispense with the ambulance? Never!
He'd dispense with all charities, too, if he could;
No! No! We'll support them forever.
Aren't we picking up folks just as fast as they fall?
And shall this man dictate to us? Shall he?
Why should people of sense stop to put up a fence,
while the ambulance works in the valley?"

But a sensible few, who are practical too,
will not bear with such nonsense much longer;
they believe that prevention is better than cure,
and their party will soon be the stronger.
Encourage them then, with your purse, voice, and pen,
and while other philanthropists dally,
they will scorn all pretense and put up a stout fence
on the cliff that hangs over the valley.

It occurs to me that for too many years, management of our valuable natural resources has consisted of running ambulances in the valley below. We have concentrated our efforts at repair, when prevention would have been more effective. Perhaps the clearest example is that we have waited until a species is near extinction, and then we try to protect it.

Another example is the vitriol and conflict that results when those with different agendas fail to cooperate and coordinate or even discuss, until we hit the symbolic ground below.

We have allowed ourselves to be hog-tied with ownership or land administration constraints, when we should have broken free for management purposes. We have undertaken our respective planning efforts in self-serving vacuums—with little effort to coordinate with our state, federal, or local counterparts.

Preventing resources abuse through comprehensive cooperation and coordination is far superior stewardship management to the historical isolated piecemeal approach.

This symposium has been intended to help us devise methods to construct the symbolic fence.

WHO SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD IN ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT?

In a public land state such as Utah, ecosystem management faces unique challenges. A look at an ownership map of the State, with its scattered School Trust sections, intermingled private ownership, large federal holdings that are divided among the Bureau of Land Management, Forest Service, National Park Service, and Department of Defense (along with several other, miscellaneous federal administrators), topped off with significant amounts of Native American lands, reveals that ecosystems and land administration bear no relationship.

Despite the large amount of land in the state of Utah owned by the federal government (approximately 70 percent), no single federal agency has jurisdiction over the entire land base of any *significant* ecosystem.

Even within those ecosystems where the land may be owned or managed exclusively by the federal government, the federal government does not have jurisdiction over important elements of the ecosystem. For example, the Forest Service (or Bureau of Land Management, etc.) may own the land, but the State has management of the wildlife, and the water is under the jurisdiction of the State.

Political or jurisdictional boundaries do not match any ecosystem.

Even though ecosystems do not conform to State boundaries either, perhaps states are the most practical unit where the line for management purposes should be drawn. Even though states may be a minority landowner, they do maintain *statewide* jurisdiction over wildlife, water, regulation of water, air quality, etc. For these reasons, I believe it is incumbent upon states to take the lead in implementing ecosystem management.

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT IS NOT AN OUTCOME, IT IS A PROCESS

I do not see ecosystem management as the end result. I believe that it is a process, a method of management. I define it as communication and coordination between various levels of government and citizenry. It is based upon a sharing of the very best data and information and a balancing of needs and values so that better decisions can be made. It is "situational," i.e., the geographical scope of an ecosystem will vary with the circumstances; the available data and information, the governmental entities involved, the geography, the resource of greatest concern, etc. Therefore, it is not important (or possible), for us to all leave here today with a fixed understanding of what an "ecosystem" is in all circumstances, but it is essential that we accept the imperative that we work together in the challenge of resource management.

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT CANNOT SUCCEED IF IT IS TOP DOWN DRIVEN

Those of us who see ecosystem management as a positive thing must be careful to avoid trying to shove it down the throats of others. I believe we are doomed to failure if we at the state or federal level see it as a mechanism of "central planning." We must involve local governments and citizens every step of the way. Their active involvement and acceptance is critical to success.

ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT CANNOT BECOME THE VICTIM OF "SECOND AGENDAS"

I cannot think of anything that would be more counterproductive to the acceptance and successful implementation of ecosystem management than for it to become a tool of those who have so-called "second agendas." Specifically, it cannot be used to expand federal power vis-a-vis the states or local units of government. Second, it cannot be used to diminish private property rights. And third, it cannot become a cover for bad or inadequate science.

It will also fail, in my opinion, if the ecosystem proposed for management is defined as pre-Columbian in nature, i.e., pre-European settlement.

CONCLUSION

The state of Utah is committed to become a leader in the area of ecosystem management. Personally, I see it as a major opportunity for those of us who have stewardship over natural resources to do our jobs better with less conflict and greater rewards.

Thank you.